

ORSETT PSYCHOLOGICAL REVIEW

No.16 - DECEMBER 2005

ISSN: 1474-0311

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This Is My Psychology: Critical Sociological Psychology

INTRODUCTION

Psychology is and has always been made up of many different perspectives or theoretical standpoints. These underpin the everything in psychology from the explanations of behaviour through to the actual behaviours studied and research methods used. Put another way, "psychology does not exist as a homogeneous discipline. Its immediate history may be relatively short but it is extremely varied" (Stevens 1996 pp26-27).

Critical Sociological Psychology (CSP) is a perspective born out of a combination of ideas from the history of psychology with specific assumptions about the subject matter of psychology, and how this should be studied and understood. Table 1 lists the perspectives that are the main influences on CSP. Each perspective has a history and its own influences. Many of the ideas overlap.

- Social constructionism
- Critical psychology
- Discursive psychology
- Sociological Social Psychology (SSP)
- Anti/Critical psychiatry
- Symbolic Interactionism
- Labelling Theory
- Feminist theories

Table 1 - Main perspectives influencing CSP.

The two most important influences - critical psychology and SSP - are discussed in detail now.

CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Critical psychology can be seen as a product of the "crisis" in psychology which occurred in the 1970s. This "crisis" related to the loss of faith in the traditional dominance of experimental and scientific ideas in psychology. The challenge to these ideas came from the realisation that concepts and knowledge are historical products rather than truths-for-all-time (Gergen 1973). In other words, the social construction of knowledge.

Critical psychology is one of many theories to develop from the "crisis" (sometimes known as the "new paradigm"). It is not necessarily easy to define, and it combines a number of perspectives or epistemological positions (Parker 1999):

Critical psychology aims to challenge the dominate theories and perspectives in psychology and work towards redressing the injustices, misrepresentations and implicit ideological imbalances endemic to academic and professional practice (Forrester 1999 p34).

Parker (1999) felt that any understanding of critical psychology must contain the following four elements:

i) Limits

This is "the systematic examination of how some varieties of psychological action and experience are privileged over others, how dominant accounts of 'psychology' operate ideologically and in the service of power" (p13). Thus psychology is not about truths of behaviour for-all-time, but how certain explanations become seen as "true".

Ideology is important here, and it can be defined as "the organisation of material signifying practices that constitute subjectivities and produce the lived relations by which subjects are connected.. to the dominant relations of production and distribution of power.. in a specific social form at a given historical moment" (Ebert 1988 p23). Ideology creates both individuals and their social worlds (Sapsford and Dallos 1996).

ii) Resistance

This is "the study of the ways in which all varieties of psychology are culturally historically constructed, and how alternative varieties of psychology may confirm or resist ideologically assumptions in mainstream models" (p13). Resistance concerns the "use" of psychology to challenge the ways that dominant power groups would have psychology to be and do.

Intelligence is a key example. Educational success in the UK is constructed around the obvious idea that intelligence varies between individuals, and psychology simply confirms this: ".. it is worrying that many contemporary textbooks still make assumptions based on the idea that intelligence is a more or less fixed capacity in individuals, bounded by some biological or genetic capacity" (Bird 1999 p24).

Thus we are left with "dull bodies and bright bodies", clever and stupid kids, intelligent and thick adults, and degrees within those. Intelligence, by the specific social construction we have, is something that an individual has or doesn't have, like money. Why is it not better to see an individual as competent in a particular situation to do a specific task? This

suggests a more fluid understanding of ability. Competence, ability, and intelligence are all labels which carry much social meaning.

Critical psychology wants to challenge and resist the imposition of fixed labels of "high intelligence" or "low intelligence" which are products of language rather than products of reality.

iii) Psychological culture

Here Parker meant "the study of forms of surveillance and self-regulation in everyday life and the ways in which psychological culture operates beyond the boundaries of academic and professional practice" (p14).

Psychology in recent years has become very popular in society generally, and how the ideas are now often seen as commonsense (eg: adult problems come from negative early childhood experiences). Moscovici (1976; quoted in Potter 1996) showed how 1950s France had absorbed the ideas of psychoanalysis into the popular culture (even if in a simplified form). How much more now in the UK as "ordinary people" talk of "repression" or being "anal retentive" as normal parts of everyday language.

No documentary or talkshow on television about behaviour can be without the appearance of psychologists (even if what they say is inane), and/or reference to psychological explanations. But the psychology presented, which is part of the everyday culture or psychological culture, has particular ways of controlling individuals.

"Commonsense in psychological culture contains all the things we 'know' most deeply about ourselves, and things we feel to be unquestioningly true" (Parker 1999 p14).

For example, commonsense tells us that there are general gender differences in behaviour, and psychology often supports this with evidence of the biological basis to these differences: eg: "men are ambitious, women are nurturing". To suggest these general gender differences do not exist seems ludicrous because it is commonsense that men and women are different.

To quote the title of a popular psychology book, "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" (Gray 1993). In the introduction, the author said:

Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment (Gray 1993 p5).

The whole book, which is advising (heterosexual) couples on how to improve their communication and thus their relationships, works on the assumption that men and women are very different. Chapter titles included "men are like rubber bands", "women are like waves", and "men go their caves and women talk".

Critical psychology challenges such assumptions for constructing controls and restrictions on individuals. The "Battle of the Sexes" discourse benefits certain groups in society. Within a patriarchal context, the emphasis on difference allows men to distinguish themselves from women, and maintain their dominant position in society (Brewer 2004b).

On the other hand, it is not about men and women being the same for: "both 'difference' and 'sameness' are promiscuous and deceptive discursive strategies. Both deflect our attention away from institutions, dominance and radical social change" (Fine and Addlestone 1996 p84). Basically, one individual may be different to another individual (irrelevant of their gender or sex).

iv) Everyday psychology as a resource

This is a challenge to academic psychologists or experts who claim that their knowledge of psychology is so much more important than that of "ordinary people" (ie the expert knows you better than yourself).

"Psychology is nourished by ordinary explanations of mental goings on, and it digests commonsense before regurgitating it as something pretending to be extraordinary" (Parker 1999 p15).

Kitzinger (1999) also included as assumptions of critical psychology: opposition to positivistic traditions in psychology (ie traditional scientific methods and theories); critical of the concept of "self-contained individualism"; and "the deconstruction of everyday taken-for-granted categories of knowledge".

SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

O'Donnell (1992) defined sociology simply as "the systematic study of societies". Sociology includes questions like "how is society constructed?", "how does society function?", and "what is the relationship of the individual to society?". This compares to the traditional definition of psychology as the "scientific study of behaviour and mental processes" (Atkinson et al 1990). In practice, this usually means that psychology focuses on the individual, and individual causes of behaviour (with society being of limited importance).

Sociological psychology takes the principles of sociology and uses them to study psychology. This is most obvious in social psychology with Sociological Social Psychology (SSP) (Still 1996).

A crucial part of SSP is social constructionism. Brewer (2003c) listed the "principles" of social constructionism as:

- i) The crucial importance of culture and social practices in understanding behaviour;
- ii) The transmission of culture and social practices through language, which is not neutral but value laden;
- iii) The research methods of choice are qualitative;
- iv) Studying the individual cannot take place outside their social environment.

These ideas may be more important in social psychology, but I want to expand them to cover all areas of psychology eg Wilson 1999 and cognitive psychology). So we have social constructionist explanations for all behaviours, and thus sociological psychology.

Sociological Psychology includes a greater awareness of sociological issues like social class and inequality, for example. A good example of the type of research (action research to be precise) is work in Bogota, Colombia by Estrada and Botero (2000) to help poor women set up employment projects ("solidarity-based economy"). The researchers pointed out that, at the beginning of the project (mid-1990s), 38.3% of women in Bogota were defined as poor.

CRITICAL SOCIOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

CSP is a combination of many of the ideas mentioned above, but also I have my particular emphases for psychology.

1. Multi-disciplinary and wide-ranging

Still (1996) lamented the fact that SSP and Psychological Social Psychology (PSP) have their own journals and textbooks, and refer to their own authors only, which suggested two distinct disciplines. Psychologists tend only ever to read psychology books and journals even if there were being more general, rarely anything outside their discipline. However, most disciplines are similar.

But this is so limiting. The boundaries of each academic discipline, whether it be psychology, sociology,

or whatever, are socially constructed. Knowledge cannot be segmented into such pieces without losing something. Psychology should be studied from many different angles including sociology, anthropology, biology, medicine, media studies, history, and politics among others.

For example, in a series of articles with Daniel Allsopp (eg: Allsopp and Brewer 2001a; 2001b), we tried to combine ideas from psychology (social constructionism in particular) and from cognitive science to explore the problems of computer modelling of human behaviour.

This is not just about making academics read more widely, but because "ordinary people" are not confined to that which is studied only in psychology. Through the medium of television individuals are aware (whether they are conscious or not) of current world events and historical ones. To understand the individual today psychology needs to work on a wide canvas. Some writers have seen this as the product of globalisation or post-modernity (Brewer 2003d).

I have talked elsewhere about understanding the social-historical-cultural (SHC) context (social structures, historical aspects, and cultural norms) (Brewer 2002) of the individual and their behaviour. Table 2 gives an example of the types of areas for the SHC context of a white British male today. The individual at this moment in time comes from many different sources.

Taking account of all of these factors is hard work when studying specific behaviours. It is much easier to focus on particulars. But to focus on the specific gene for aggression, for example, will not tell us why an individual was aggressive in a particular situation at one particular time

SOCIAL STRUCTURES	CULTURAL NORMS	HISTORICAL ASPECTS
Within society: - gender - social class - ethnicity - age - sexual orientation - able-body/disabled - power	- eg of masculinity - eg of "consumer capitalism" - role of media in social control - other agents of social control	- key historical events and ideas in nation's history eg British Empire; first industrial revolution - current home and world events
Society as whole: - "consumer capitalism"		
Beyond society: - post-modernity - globalisation		

Table 2 - Examples of factors in the SHC context for a white British male today.

This will be due to the product of many different and wide-ranging factors. In the synthesis model of aggression (Brewer 2003a), I emphasised the role of individual, group and social factors in aggression as well as the difference between the general level of aggression and a specific act of aggression.

2. Awareness of social issues

Traditionally psychology has wanted to stay away from social issues, particularly complex ones, because those are the territory of sociology or politics. Psychology has wanted to be as neutral and objective as possible, and focus on the individual and their behaviour. But "ordinary people" are aware of social issues (whether they want to be or not) because social issues permeate all behaviour.

Psychology benefits from studying meanings that individuals hold and these underpin behaviour. Meanings are socially based and constructed. Meanings can only be studied with qualitative methods (Brewer 2005b). This is not to say that other methods (ie: quantitative) are useless, but their use is limited. Rather than worrying about the scientific validity of methods, it is better to concentrate upon what can be learnt.

Sociologists use observations, ideas, and opinions of the writer also as their data. These are taken at face-value (ie: whether they are helpful in understanding behaviour) rather than being concerned with them not being scientific. The need to be scientific all the time in psychology has been called "natural science envy" by Henwood and Pidgeon (1992).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) felt that research should be assessed by its fruitfulness - the ability of the research to produce new explanations.

An awareness of social issues will also help in widening the teaching of topics in psychology. Often topics are taught in sterile ways (eg: general ideas about prejudice) rather than with relevant examples (eg prejudice and discrimination against Muslims in Britain since the bombings in London in July 2005).

Or, for example, developmental psychology is often taught with general theories (and Western bias) ignoring the realities of childhood in the non-Western countries of the world. How applicable is a general Western theory of development to a child living in poverty, exploitation, and armed conflict (Brewer 2005a)?

3. Political world and opinions

Wetherell (1996) argued that social psychology should be a "political science" with its work as social change:

The significance of research has to be decided by discussion, dialogue and debate and we should see ourselves as contributing to these kinds of negotiations which are at the core of the democratic process (p12).

"Ordinary people" hold opinions, whether they are especially interested in party politics or not, so why shouldn't psychologists? It seems strange that psychologists should carry out research and work without giving opinions. But, in reality, the opinions are hidden under the cover of "objective" statements. "Research questions are structured by personal and political interests that need to be explored rather than hidden away, for it is when they are concealed that they do most damage" (Banister et al 1994 p9).

A prime example here is mental health. Foucault (1982) accused those working in the mental health field of "taking what is an essentially political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse and recasting it in the neutral language of science. Once this is accomplished the problems have become technical ones" (p196).

So, for example, mental illness has become a technical problem of the correct diagnosis rather than the fact that it is a deeply political issue: poverty, exploitation, social isolation, and discrimination all impacting on mental health (Prilleltensky 1999).

Here I also mean questions as to whether certain mental illnesses actually exist (eg: Minor Depressive Disorder; Brewer 2003b), or how some behaviours become defined as "abnormal" (and mentally ill) (Brewer 2001a). Mental illness as a technical problem means the experiences of individuals with mental illness are "dis-authenticated" - "regarded as unimportant and as not reflecting 'what was really going on'" (Sapsford and Dallos 1996 p194).

Prilleltensky (1996) highlighted three elements of what he called a "macrosociopolitical approach" to mental health issues:

i) Politicise the public - encourage more campaigning over inequality issues;

ii) Create partnerships for solidarity with the

oppressed;

iii) Engage in systematic political thinking and action - eg: resolving poverty by introducing higher taxes for wealthier individuals.

It could be argued that such policies are not for psychologists to be concerned about, but inequality in society affects individual psychology. Whether it is the consequence of living in poverty, or the justification of their wealth for the rich. In both cases, the psychology of the individuals will be quite different.

Psychology has to be political because "ordinary people" live in a political world today. They are not living in a vacuum as the traditional experiment would hope. The "ruling system" for many in the world is capitalism with its inequalities (Brewer 2004a), and, more than that, its "system justification" (Jost and Banaji 1994):

(T)he psychological process by which existing social arrangements are legitimised, even at the expense of personal and group interest.. Examples might include.. "a kind of comfort in believing that one's sufferings are unavoidable or deserved".. and thinking that "whatever rank is held in the social order represents their intrinsic worth" (pp1-2).

Different terms have been used to describe the state of the world today, one is "neo-liberalism", characterised by "the ongoing dissolution of the welfare state", "the ascent of deregulation and market ideologies", and "the increasing role of transnational institutions and multinational companies" (Papadopoulos 1999; quoted in Gordo-Lopez 2000).

My starting point is more specific than capitalism, it is a particular form of capitalism - "consumer capitalism" - which is dominant in the UK since the last quarter of the twentieth century. The key meaning in "consumer capitalism" is products and services (ie: buying things), but specifically consumer items (those not necessary for basic survival). But this is in the context of saturated markets, and thus the need for "pressurised marketing" of consumer products. What emerges is that consumerism can be called a "civil religion" (Bellah 1967), and it gives all underpinning social and personal meaning to life (Brewer 2001a).

"The current economic system is dependent on the continued social creation of consumer desire" (Cooper and Evans no date). Thus "Advertising successfully persuades

consumers that without certain products they will appear either ugly, uncultivated, or offensive, leading others to withdraw attention" (Derber 2000 p62).

Later (Brewer 2001b), I distinguished further aspects of "consumer capitalism" as:

- a) The "commodification" of every aspect of life;
- b) The "sexualisation" of all aspects of society both in terms of using sex to sell products, and sex as a product;
- c) The distancing of consumer and producer leading to feelings of helplessness and powerlessness.

A desire for social change of "consumer capitalism", which promotes wastage and unsustainability, to a different type of society, not necessarily "anti-capitalist", but a different type of "capitalism" (eg: "conserver society"; Trainer 1995). A "conserver society" is not only sustainable, but breaks out of the dependence on economic growth, and the negatives of capitalism like the inevitable inequality of wealth (table 3).

- Living more simply - fewer non-necessities; more recycling
- Greater self-sufficiency - eg: market gardens; alternative technologies
- More co-operation - sharing property; voluntary groups
- Change systems - need to consume less eg less travel to work
- Economy - zero-growth economy; devolution of functions to neighbourhood level

Table 3 - Main principles of a "conserver society".

Kagan and Burton (2000) quoted other examples of "new social relations": Local Employment Trading Systems (LETS); supported living for impaired individuals; co-operative movements; and empowerment.

4. Ideas and research are an extension of the researcher

In quantitative research, the researcher attempts to keep themselves outside the research situation, and to concentrate upon the study. While in qualitative research, it is accepted that humans are studying humans, and it is impossible for the researcher to keep themselves from the research situation. Thus the researcher becomes central (and an asset) to the research. So it is with CSP.

There is a responsibility, though, for the researcher to be reflexive - whether it be personal,

functional (the research process), or disciplinary (research methods generally) (Wilkinson 1988).

So CSP is my psychology, not in some egotistical sense, but in the way that the ideas and emphases are intrinsically linked to who I am.

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Article written November 2005

Social Construction of Identity: A Post-Structural Critique of Individualism

INTRODUCTION

As a cultural ideology the individualistic concept of the "self-contained individual" relies heavily upon a set of unproven, yet taken-for-granted individualistic assumptions centring on the negative relationship established within self/other binaries. It is then, perhaps, comfortable to believe there exists some centrality of private experience that allows us to be conscious decision-makers and masters of our own actions.

However, "possessive individualism" (Sampson 2003) such as this asserts that to be the owners of ones own capacities and self, one cannot be beholden to anyone else.

There are inherent problems within this ideology and the central belief that is pivotal to individualism and the Cartesian model ⁽¹⁾ of self: ergo that we come into the world as isolated beings and leave alone. If this is so then we are all essentially alone, never fully able to be revealed in our isolation and, alternatively, we can never know what others truly want, or are hiding from us. Even in the most intimate of moments no "one" can know the "other's" true feelings, so, in effect, the mutual isolation of both is locked arm in arm with distrust.

Within individualist traditions Sampson (2003) argued "others" are posited as "potential thieves of ones personhood.. The more the 'other' is involved in the life of the person the less the person is involved in his or her own life" (p125).

The classical Cartesian conception of the unitary subject as an "individual" is upheld by modernists ⁽²⁾ who argue fiercely that identity has "some 'core' or essence that must remain the same" (Sarup 1996 p175). The "self" here is viewed as fully conscious and self-knowable: the "I" within "I think therefore I am".

This is a self whose thinking processes are not coerced by historical or cultural circumstance, instead it is a free and intellectual agent - a true individual. This view of Reason expressed by Descartes in his philosophical work described an autonomous and coherent self. He offers, as it were, "a narrator who imagines that he speaks without simultaneously being spoken" (Sarup 1993 p1).

In relation to the existence of a "core self", the argument put forward here takes a critical psychological standpoint, aligning itself with those theories put forward by Gergen (eg: 1991), and post-structurally with Foucault (eg: 1976) and Derrida (eg: 1981), all of whom

can be seen to refute individualism in favour of social constructionist and deconstructionist thinking.

Here the term "subject" is used deliberately as a post-structural mechanism that serves to decentre consciousness. Instead of the autonomous and unitary "individual", the self is now able to be viewed as a construct, a series of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious.

This argument, then, is diametrically opposed to the Cartesian model and now suggests that the self is constituted by a series of dispersed identities. Brewer (2000) felt that the post-modern self was made up of many different identities, and did not contain a "core self". He argued there is no "true self" out there to be found, as the "self" is always:

(L)ocated in the situation in which the individual is existing. Identity is multifaceted, but based upon key relational settings. It is the relations within the settings that create the self" (p33).

Discursively these "relations" can be seen as subject positionings within interpretative repertoires ⁽³⁾ (Potter and Wetherell 1987) that contextually locate the self.

There can be no single unitary self as this itself presupposes identification; subjects are constituted, composed as it were of multiple and contradictory subjectivities or subject positionings. Madan Sarup (1996) demonstrated the contextual usefulness of psychoanalysis by highlighting how Lacan (eg: 1977) viewed the unitary subject as myth, arguing that not only is the subject split, but also its very production is dependent upon the use of language.

The critical shift of focus away from the subject to the text that defines post-structural deconstruction however reveals a paradox. Nietzsche (1964) highlighted how both language and text are never able to be fixed or fully deciphered arguing that all of us are bound by our own perspective, a fact that is inescapable.

Pivotal to this is the suggestion, also put forward by Nietzsche, that we are unable to escape the constraints of language, and yet paradoxically have no alternative but to operate within the very structure of language.

The reflexive dilemma that ensues is that the claim that we are trapped is constructed through the very concepts suggested by that which entraps us in the first place. One of the methods that Nietzsche used to cope with this dilemma was to intersubstitute opposites.

Where one is always bound by ones perspective, as

Nietzsche argued, then by reversing perspectives as often as possible a process of undoing will occur whereby opposed perspectives are revealed and made visible as terms of opposition. These can be viewed as acting merely as accomplices to one another paralleling the deconstructive stance taken by Derrida.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND POST-MODERNISM

Social constructionism puts forward the argument that the psychological is fashioned from the social, that is, that there is a social world and it pre-exists the psychological; and that once the social world has made its mark on the psychological, the self exists independent of society.

Post-structural arguments revoke the structural rigidity ensconced within Saussure's (1974) theories claiming the relationship between signifier and signified (4) is fluid and not fixed thus allowing intertextuality (5) to exist.

Post-modernist theories are concerned primarily with the signifier rather than the signified, and view the symbolic ordering of space and time as pivotal in providing a framework for experience that allows us to learn who, or what we are in society.

Such theories reject wholesale the ideologies of individualist traditions and the notion of a self-contained individual arguing instead that the self is fluid and changeable and at any given moment is the sum of all its interactions relative to time and space. A simpler but more eloquent analogy, made by Wetherell and Maybin (1996), was that the self can be described as "a line momentarily and arbitrarily drawn around pieces of the public world" (p222).

The construction of identity, Wetherell (1996) argued, is "a never-ending process of telling stories and discovering narratives which 'make sense' in terms of the internal conversations we hold inside our heads, in our dialogues with others and which work pragmatically in terms of our social positions" (p306).

Where social constructionists argue that the self is a product of those around us, our subject positioning to them, and the socio-cultural environment in which we live, a post-structuralist revision might read, "the formation of the self is shaped by discourses and subject positionings within power/knowledge complexes (Foucault 1980) relative to time and space".

From a deconstructionist standpoint, then, the discursive truths bound within both these statements is visible from the earliest stages of life, when children can be seen to negotiate power relations through the

dialogues in which they are involved, and that positions them in particular ways. Such positions are constructed from the power relations that exist between and within binary oppositionings that form an important aspect of the repertoires encountered by the emerging self.

It is though repeated exposure to discursive practise and frequently occurring metaphors and tropes that the social representations of the evolving social person are constructed.

Even in those cultures that contrast with Western thinking, such as Japan, there is evidence of how concepts of the person, or "Moi" (Mauss 1985) psychologically influence the perception of the self in relation to others, (and "Personne").

Wetherell and Maybin (1996) used the work of Muhlhausler and Harre (1990) to highlight the importance of grammar in such cultures as being both psychologically and linguistically important. The positioning of the subject themselves within any form of social interaction and conversation they claim:

(D)epend intimately upon the patterns of self-reference which are possible in their language as well as other aspects of their social situation. Grammar and the pragmatics of everyday language use can highlight certain kinds of identity and social relationships (Wetherell and Maybin 1996 p223).

Subject positioning then can be defined as the way in which people are positioned through discursive practises and the way in which such practises generate individual subjectivities. Davis and Harre (1995) argued that a subject position:

..Incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as ones own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts that are made relevant within the particular discursive practise in which they are positioned (quoted in Harre and Stearns 1995 p162).

When contextually set against discourses of post-modern identity construction, subject positions may be seen by one or other of the participants in terms of known roles (actual or metaphorical) or in terms of known characters in shared story lines.

More ephemeral positioning Harre (1979) suggested,

may often involve shifts in power, access, or blocking of access, of certain features of claimed or desired identity. It could be said then that the best way of understanding a person is to see them as a set of possible and actual locations that emerge out of conversations and social acts. The relationship between subject positioning and power/knowledge complexes is resultant of three possible orders of positioning: those being first, second and third order.

Analysis of subject positioning within determinate speech acts reveals how ideological power imbalances construct individual and group subjectivities. Wetherell and Maybin (1996) suggested that positioning is a key factor in determining the evolution of the social self, arguing that from the very start children begin "negotiating power relations through the dialogues in which they are involved and which position them in particular ways" (p264).

Post-modern theorists such as Gergen (1991; 2000) stressed the post-modern self is shaped by the contextual setting of the current millennia where the "self", he argued, is subjected to an overwhelming number of graphic and unreal media images twenty-four hours a day, whilst seemingly overrun by networked interactions and unattainable and conflicting responsibilities that lead to its overpopulation and subsequent multiphrenic fragmentation.

Post-structuralist and post-modern critiques of the self argue that the acquisition of knowledge results from the unending interface with discourses that both shape and give meaning to the "self", and the environment in which it perceives itself to be. The exponential creation of new discourses further shape and position the self within an unending collision of social processes and experiences across time.

By a process of overpopulation and technological information overload, the self is often said to be "socially saturated" (Gergen 1991). Gergen argued that multiphrenic states and fragmentation often result, with the individual able to "inscribe, erase and re-write their identities as the ever-shifting, ever-expanding and coherent networks of relationships invites and permits" (p228).

The socio-historical acquisition of knowledge of earlier romanticist and modernist concepts of being become dissolved or fragmented and replaced with a populated self that seeks variation through self-contradiction. This is seemingly recognised by Baudrillard (1983) who suggested: "Our private sphere has ceased to be the stage where the drama of the subject at odds with his objects is played out; we no longer exist

as playwrights or actors, but as terminals of multiple networks" (quoted in Gergen 1991 p267).

Gergen suggested that when exposed to others we are changed in two important ways and described them as "knowing that" and "knowing how". This is part of the process of social saturation by which we come to know of objects and their relative cultural meaning to us here and now. Through exposure to others we internalise enormous amounts of information about how discourses interchange (eg: speech, dress codes, or social norms).

Within these discourses many interpretative repertoires are lived and experienced and then re-experienced as socio-cultural metaphors or tropes. Each experience and its innumerable tropic variations have therefore been played out many times before and one can usually meet most situations as an agentive self with a number of options available to act upon across a range of subject positionings. It is the interactional experience of meetings between these objects, set within relative power/knowledge complexes (Foucault 1980) that are themselves contextually bound archeologically by time and socially by space that both constructs and populates the self.

DICHOTOMY AND BINARY

The definition of any object or identity within our consciousness, be it female/male, table/chair lies not just in the objects themselves but also in what they are not. To give anything an identity, that is, to say what it is, means it is necessary to say what it is not. All presence must therefore contain absence, and the nature of things can be seen to lie ultimately in the relations between them, rather than in the things themselves.

Sampson (1989) suggested that where presence must contain absence there cannot be a neatly drawn line of opposition between the two notions. It is not that there is either presence or absence, but rather that there is an inevitable defining of the one through the other: there is both presence and absence.

Feminine and masculine identities are constructed through discourses and the discursive formation of related objects and "structures that constitute the subject himself" (Foucault 1976 p85). The discursive relativism that underpins Foucault's suggestion that language shapes realities and objects is supported by Britton (1975) who argued that: "The objects and events of the world do not present themselves to us ready classified. The categories into which they are divided are the categories into which we divide them" (p23).

Foucault, and post-modern feminists, such as Judith Butler (eg: 1990; 1993), viewed the self as a fiction of

modernity, constructed through discourses such as metaphysical philosophy and psychoanalysis (Bakhurst and Sypnowich 1995). The self it is argued has no true nature or essence but is a discursive effect seen through our form of representation. This level of anti-realism/essentialism ⁽⁶⁾ challenges not only the pretensions of Cartesianism but also questions the very idea that both the subjectivity and the structure of a life presuppose a focus in a single unitary subject.

If we are to think of ourselves this way, it is argued, this is not a consequence of the way selves are, or even of the way we must represent them, but a fact about the character of the societies and cultures in which we live; our modes of self representation are themselves socially constructed.

The formation of binary oppositions in Western society, it is argued by Derrida, often sees a tendency to privilege or value one side over the other (Burr 1995). Western patriarchal cultures masculinise the dominant hegemonic, favouring, for example, patriarchy over matriarchy, rationality over emotionality, mind over body, and order over disorder.

The subordinated opposites within each of these binaries are feminised, according to some feminists (Spender 1993), and Cixous (1981) who argued from a psychoanalytic standpoint that binaries are phallogcentrically positioned. At this level of scrutiny then, the removal of women's agency and their disempowerment as a discursive structure visibly leads to the construction of a subjugated self, within those repertoires that bind it contextually.

Baudrillard can be seen to emphasize a number of pivotal binaries that shaped and constructed our perceptions of the post-modern self, those being subject/object, masculine/feminine, appearance/reality, depth/surface, and production/sign. The dominant binaries here work together to form simulacra ⁽⁷⁾, which, it is argued by Baudrillard (1983) have resulted in:

(T)he triumph of object over subject within the proliferation of an object world so completely out of control that it surpasses all attempts to understand, conceptualise and understand it
(Sarup 1996 p115).

Baudrillard's emphasis upon the way in which commodities fascinate individuals within consumer societies whilst concomitantly creating individual and group subjectivities through production/seduction power imbalances has much in common with Brewer's later theory on consumerism as a civil religion (2001).

THE BODY AND HETEROSEXUALITY

A discursive formation as opposed to a physical object, the body has shaped many of the discourses that construct masculinities and femininities. Foucault argued, "discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies" (1979 p138).

These "docile" bodies are dominated, according to Foucault and made to conform to particular institutional regimes, practised in that they are made useful and productive. This is achieved not by physical coercion but rather by panopticism, the inducement to watch ourselves because we imagine ourselves observed by others.

Feminists, such as Luce Irigaray, frame their critiques within psychoanalysis suggesting that the definition of women's bodies as sexual takes place within discourses that define them as objects of male desire, and in which sexuality itself is constructed phallogcentrically (Sarup 1993).

Signified perceptions of both masculine and feminine sexual identities are constantly being constructed and deconstructed by the signifiers that define them and give them structure. Semiotically, the discursive signifiers of heterosexuality (mother/child, husband/wife) form androcentric (8) metaphors, which are themselves, constructed of phallogcentric dualities (Cixous 1981).

Feminists, such as Cixous, argued that much of what is said and the way it is said, what is written and the way it is written largely reflect masculinity and especially male sexuality. When conceptualised on a linear model, sexual identities signified by homosexuality and lesbianism are as far removed from their heterosexual binary counterparts as the constructed signifiers of the dominant ideology contextually dictate at that time.

Being the dominant Western ideology, heterosexuality forms the hegemonic standard from which all other sexualities deviate or fragment. Paradoxically, despite promoting gendered social cohesion heterosexuality can be seen as contributing to the gulf between male and female experiences of sexuality via the discursive construction of male and female identities.

Subject positionings within male/female binaries are enforced by the use of implicit and explicit socio-cultural norms, such as status or essentialized gender divisions and the construction of those structures and objects that are seen to stand in opposition to them. Each of these identities and the multiple positionings they encounter minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, are synthesized through discursive representation into the fragmented self.

Butler (in Gergen and Gergen 2003) undermined

essentialism through deconstruction, arguing that gender and sex are both fictions that are performed through the body in order to regulate sexuality in the context of mandatory reproductive heterosexuality. The deconstruction of these binaries reveals that the binary oppositioning of female/male and masculine/feminine within Western cultures, are dominated by generic masculine binaries.

It is argued by Butler that these masculinized hegemonies visibly promote androcentricity whilst subordinating feminine binaries, for example, compliance/resistance within female/male oppositionings.

The notion of a "core self" is, as suggested earlier then, a myth. Through deconstruction it is possible to see how signifiers and their signified binaries are constantly revealed, demonstrating how power moves across power/knowledge complexes, shaping subject positionings and constructing identities whilst ultimately populating the self.

FOOTNOTES

1. Descartes had the idea, in the seventeenth century, that the brain had a centre, which he said was the pineal gland. This is now completely discounted, but the principle of the self having a centre is part of the Cartesian model.

2. Modernist refers to ideas that dominated Western thinking since the Enlightenment, including the assumption of an "autonomous, self-contained individual with a rich conscious and even unconscious inner life.." (Smith 1994 p406).

3. Interpretative repertoires are the "sum of different discourses, and the ways that they can be combined or mixed together, which the individual has at their disposal to construct subject positions" (Cooper and Kaye 2002 p101).

4. For Saussure, a sign is the basic element of language, and a signifier is that part of the sign that is accessible to the senses. The signified is what the signifier means, and is "always something of an interpretation that is added to the signifier" (Phillips 2000 p118). Put another way, words have no objective meaning, but meanings exist in the differences between the signifiers.

5. Intertextuality is where a current text is dependent upon other texts, and in doing so, both texts are transformed for the reader (Reynolds 1996)

6. "Essentialism is most commonly understood as a belief

in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (Fuss 1989 pxi).

7. A simulcra is an image that does not or never existed, but has shared social meanings.

8. Androcentric based on androgens or testosterone (ie male hormone).

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Article written May 2004 and July 2005

(Footnotes - Kevin Brewer)

At Last, A Realisation That the Psychology of the World is not the Same as Western Psychology

A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST REVIEW ESSAY

Richard.E.Nisbett (2005) *The Geography of Thought*
London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing; ISBN 1-85788-353-5;
264 pp & xxiv

INTRODUCTION

Richard Nisbett is probably best associated with the classic experimental work on attribution in the 1970s. For example, in Nisbett et al (1973), it was shown that individuals attributed different reasons for themselves or another person doing the same behaviour (eg: volunteering to raise money for charity).

Working with US college students as the participants, this type of research assumed that the findings were applicable throughout the world. Nisbett admitted such assumptions behind his work at the time with the book entitled "Human Inference" (Nisbett and Ross 1980): "Not Western inference (and certainly not American college student inference!), but human inference" (*italics in original*) (Nisbett 2005 pxiv). Not only the assumption of universality, but of thinking being hard wired as well.

Subsequently, Nisbett came to reflect upon those assumptions, particularly after working with a Chinese student. This led to a different way of viewing psychology which is the basis of "The Geography of Thought":

If people really do differ profoundly in their systems of thought - their worldviews and cognitive processes - then differences in people's attitudes and beliefs, and even their values and preferences, might not be a matter merely of different inputs and teachings, but rather an inevitable consequence of using different tools to understand the world
(Nisbett 2005 pxvii).

Social constructionism would echo the sentiments of cultural differences in behaviour and thinking because these are socially and culturally constructed. Social constructionism would go further than just the differences between Asian and Western thought, explained by Nisbett, to look at all cultural (and sub-cultural) differences.

For social constructionism, language is the means by

which individuals are culturally constructed. For example, Lienhardt (1985) highlighted how the language used by the Dinka people (Sudan) constructed a different view of the self to that of the West. There is no real word in the Dinka language for "self", rather "gwop" (meaning "body") is used. Thus "myself" is "I body", and "yourself" is "your body". These meanings "are not emerging in abstract but are tied to social practices such as streams of joint activities around the collection of food, forms of agriculture, and the distribution of resources, and kin systems for regulating sexuality and inheritance" (Wetherell and Maybin 1996 pp233-234).

Often cultural differences are overlooked because it is assumed that certain behaviours are so basic (or core) that they must be universal. Nisbett (2005) listed some of the generalisations about human behaviour held by "most Westerners, or at any rate most Americans". These included:

- a) Each individual is distinctive with a unique set of characteristics;
- b) People are mainly in control of their behaviour;
- c) People "strive to feel good about themselves; personal successes and assurances that they have positive qualities are important to their sense of well-being" (p48).

The whole argument of "The Geography of Thought" is that such assumptions may be true in the West, but not necessarily in Asia. These are two distinct ways of thinking and behaving that can be summarised as independence (West) and interdependence (Asia). This distinction manifests itself in many ways including the "insistence on freedom of individual action vs a preference for collective action" or the "desire for individual distinctiveness vs a preference for blending harmoniously with the group".

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THOUGHT

In chapter one, Nisbett outlined the philosophical origins of the difference in Western (European culture and European American) and Asian (East Asian) thinking. For the former, it is the influence of the ancient Greeks, and ancient Chinese traditions for the latter. This chapter gives a good overview of these differences, particularly for readers with little or no knowledge of the origins.

At twenty-eight pages, it cannot hope to be comprehensive, and, of course, there are also

overgeneralisations. Nisbett admitted that "people who are highly knowledgeable about the East" will not be satisfied. But this is true of the whole book, which is an ambitious project to show how Asians and Westerners think differently.

Chapter two developed the philosophical origins of thinking in the two parts of the world to show how these impact on thinking today: "The social origins of the mind". From a social constructionist viewpoint, it is necessary to ask how deterministic is this process (ie is the individual active or passive?), and is there anything outside of socially constructed thought or whether all thinking is culturally specific? Allsopp and Brewer (2001) distinguished "cognitive common sense knowledge", which can be seen as more universal, and "social common sense knowledge" (which can be culturally specific).

In chapter three, Nisbett outlined the differences in the Western and non-Western self using mainly examples of experimental work (eg Heine et al 2001). Understanding the self is based upon meanings as data (as opposed to numbers), and thus is better suited to methods other than the experiment (and other quantitative methods).

For example, Dorinne Kondo (1990) described her experiences of the changing self as she lived in Japan for a while. She is a Japanese-American academic born and raised in the US, but because of her appearance was treated as Japanese. It was the power of these expectations that led to her changing. The social construction of the self. Kondo's study is autobiographical and gives a much more detailed understanding of the social construction of the self than experiments can give.

Chapter four showed how even the perception of the world can be different between Westerners and Asians. One aspect of this is the perception of control. In the West, the belief in the internal locus of control predominates (ie: the individual controls events rather than events controlling them - external locus of control). It is important to note that we are talking about the perception of control, not whether the individual actually does control events. For example, in games of chance, like rolling a dice, individuals will develop strategies (like talking to the dice or taking their time) to "control" what numbers they roll (Henslin 1967). Such strategies produced the perception of control, and particular ways of viewing the world, like the attribution of events (which is covered by Nisbett in chapter five).

Nisbett covered language and categorisation in chapter six, and logical thinking in chapter seven. For

social constructionism, language is the building block of understanding the world. But language is not a neutral means of describing the world, "words are constituting social and personal life" (Wetherell and Maybin 1996). More than that:

The language we use orders and evaluates knowledge and experience in relation to deeply held beliefs and values, and the particular ways in which language (or "discourses") do this tend to become dominant in specific social contexts
(Wetherell and Maybin 1996 p262).

The role of language in also constructing social relations and hierarchies can be seen in this example from Kondo (1990). She attempted to explain the Japanese words for "to hold" or "to carry". There is no single term, but many depending on who is talking to whom:

- a) "motsu" - to use with friends (informal);
- b) "mochimasu" - "medium polite" to use with acquaintances;
- c) "omochi ni narimasu" - to use with superiors;
- d) "omochi shimasu" - also with superiors meaning to carry the boss's bags.

Nisbett hoped that "The Geography of Thought" would help East and West "get along better", and in chapter eight (and the epilogue), all the ideas described before are applied. Using psychology to improve the world is an aim supported by social constructionism and critical psychology (and critical sociological psychology; Brewer 2005).

Furthermore, in chapter eight there are criticisms of IQ testing and the "dubious propositions" in the "The Bell Curve" (Herrnstein and Murray 1994) which are very welcome.

CONCLUSION

Sinha (1997) accused psychology of being culture-bound and culture-blind. Smith and Bond (1993), in writing one of the first detailed textbooks on cross-cultural psychology, noted sadly that only 6% of references in a US social psychology textbook (Baron and Byrne 1991) were from outside North America.

Psychology has for so long had a Western bias, whether it be in the amount of research, or in assumptions of the universality of Western behaviour.

Any book that attempts to rectify such weaknesses is to be welcomed, and so it is with "The Geography of

Thought". Not only can psychologists learn something from it, but it is not unattractive to the "ordinary reader".

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Kevin Brewer

Article written December 2005

Some Thoughts on the Debate about Psychosurgery

Psychosurgery is the destruction of healthy brain tissue through a variety of methods (eg cutting or burning) for the purpose of controlling behaviour. A lobotomy is the removal of part of the brain, while a leucotomy is the cutting of connections within the brain.

Historically, the origins of psychosurgery are usually credited to Walter Freeman and Egas Moniz in the 1930s. But a Swiss psychiatrist, Gottlieb Burckhardt, in 1891 performed cortical "extirpations" on six patients (Joanette et al 1993).

Thousands of operations have been performed since the 1930s (eg: 10 000 in Britain 1940-50; Dobson 1995). Its use is rarer today. Sachdev (2004) felt that much of the criticism of psychosurgery was still based upon the historical excesses.

Crossley (1993) analysed the records of the first cohort of patients at North Wales Hospital, Denbigh to receive leucotomies. Table 1 summarises the main findings of 45.5% "success" (defined as "discharged, recovered or partially recovered to return to work") compared to 65.9% in 1961.

	1942-50 MALE	FEMALE	1961 MALE	FEMALE
TOTAL PATIENTS	147	115	161	138
Discharged, recovered or partially recovered to return to work (%)	51.0	40.0	65.2	66.6

Table 1 - Percentage "success" of leucotomies at North Wales Hospital.

Cannon et al (2003) noted that:

The persistence of psychosurgery within the therapeutic armamentarium of psychiatry is something of an anachronism in the current era of evidence-based medicine. Robust evidence for efficacy does not exist and, indeed, can never realistically be gathered because of extreme ethical difficulties of carrying out randomised controlled trials in this area (p195).

To do such research would require sham intracranial surgery (ie: making a hole in the skull without working

on the brain), which "would never make it past a contemporary ethics committee" (Persaud 2003).

Persaud's arguments against the use of psychosurgery today revolved around medical advances, in drugs and treatments like trans-cranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), which are not irreversible. This is crucial - once an area of the brain has been destroyed during psychosurgery, it cannot be replaced whether the individual gets better or not. How much worse to have psychosurgery (the treatment of last resort), with the attendant hopes of improvement, to not get better, and to be left with permanent damage (and side-effects).

Psychosurgery cannot guarantee "success" because of two main problems in psychiatry. Firstly, the reality that diagnosis is far from perfect. But, second, and more important here, is the fact that specific brain areas are not linked to particular psychological problems in a simple one-to-one relationship. Persaud (2003) felt that "dysfunction is much more likely to result from the change in the relationships between several areas" (p195).

However, there are psychiatrists who support the continued use of psychosurgery for individuals with chronic depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder, who are resistant to other treatments or are even "untreatable" (eg: Crossley and Freeman 2003).

They argued that follow-up measurements after treatment showed improvements of between 30-40% and 50-60% of individuals depending on the mental disorder. The Council of the Royal College of Psychiatrists tended to support this argument from their review of the evidence (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2000).

Crossley and Freeman (2003) believed that the demise of psychosurgery "could mean the loss of a potentially useful and relatively safe approach for an extremely distressed patient group" (p196). Let us not underestimate the suffering of individuals with severe mental disorders, nor the fact that modern surgical techniques are so much better than in the past, but to say that psychosurgery is safe is interesting. Here is the problem - how to define "safe"? Very simply as not dying from the treatment means psychosurgery is very safe today. However, leaving the individual with memory deficits, for example, makes the treatment less safe.

Psychiatry tends to accept degrees of harm with any treatment:

The pain of the treatment is less than the pain of the illness, they argued. Working within a mentality that accepts pain in treatment means that unpleasant side effects are dismissed as a

"necessary evil" (Brewer 2002 p15).

With all of the money and effort being put into medical technology and drug development, it must be possible to find better techniques for helping individuals with severe mental disorders which are not irreversible. However, that is not to say that drugs are automatically always the answer for mental illness.

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Article written December 2005